

Elegance of Cuisine Is on Wane in U. S.

By CRAIG CLAIBORNE

Two time-honored symbols of the good life—great cuisine in the French tradition and elegant table service—are passing from the American scene.

“This nation,” said James A. Beard, a writer on cookery, “is more interested in preserving the whooping crane and the buffalo than in perpetuating classic cookery and improving standards of table service. We live in an age that may someday—with all justification—be referred to as the time of the decline and pall of the American palate.”

Why has this come to pass? There are several reasons:

¶The influx of master chefs ended in the Thirties with stricter immigration laws. Chefs who arrived earlier have retired or soon will. Rarely are there

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trained men to succeed them. ¶Cost control—a method devised by efficiency experts to cut expenses—cramps the enthusiasm and inventiveness of master chefs, some of them insist, but they must go along with it.

¶Training facilities for cooks and waiters are virtually nonexistent. Management and union officials are apathetic about doing anything. Nearly 18,000 cooks leave the hotel and restaurant industry each year through death, retirement or other reasons. Fewer than 8,000 are trained as replacements.

Stereotyped Menus Seen

Several chefs interviewed recently took the view that menus soon will be as stereotyped as those of a hamburger haven, except in a handful of luxury establishments.

Humbert Gatti, executive chef of the Plaza Hotel, predicts:

"Within five years kitchens à la minute will replace haute cuisine in America's major cities. The public will be offered broiled steak, broiled chicken or broiled fish. Or only sautéed dishes. No more sauce champagne, no more sauce Robert, no more filet of beef Wellington.

"Even today, you walk into kitchens that don't have a stockpot; places use beef or chicken extract to make their soups. The specialty these days seems to be quantity, not quality. I know places with a big business where they don't use ten pounds of butter a day."

Oddly, while most restaurant cooking is deteriorating, the American housewife, in this time of tourist air travel, has become familiar with classic, continental cuisine.

Sales of so-called gourmet foods have increased greatly. In supermarkets, such luxury items as snails, imported cheeses and caviar are commonplace.

French Cuisine Declining

But French cuisine, the foundation of the world's great dining rooms—whether in London, Paris or Madrid—is rapidly becoming extinct in the United States.

The great chefs would like to see the tradition kept alive, but they find it almost impossible to overcome the feeling that to be a cook or waiter is to be subservient and is not in keeping with the American picture of success. Chef Gatti has a small training program for five young men. Speaking of it, he says sadly:

"Today's young men are impatient to do what they call 'get ahead.' They work with me for \$80 a week and leave for another job that pays \$2 more. They think: 'Tomorrow I'll make \$5 more in my new job.' They don't think: 'In ten years I could be head chef.' It isn't only American boys who feel that way; it's Europeans, too." Chef Gatti's forecast of kitchens à la minute is perhaps best substantiated by the rising average age of European chefs in this country. It is 63.5 years now and one reason why it is not higher is the occasional exception, such as Pierre Franey, who at 39 is executive chef at Le Pavillon, considered by many to be the finest restaurant in the country.

Cost Control a Factor

Then there is cost control. The whole concept of hotel-keeping has changed radically from the pre-Depression days when hotels vied to provide sumptuous decor, elaborate sauces, foods out of season—and hang the expense.

Profits came from room rentals and few restaurateurs ever questioned a chef's expenditures. Reputations of many hotels such as the Ritz, the Lafayette and the Brevort were built on cuisine and service.

"In the age we live in," one hotel man says, "cost control in the kitchen is as essential as hot water and maid service."

Many quality chefs have to go along with such reality. Although French chefs have a reputation for prodigality (Antonin Carême, for example, once boiled down fourteen hams for a pint of sauce), several of those who work in New York's first-class hotels and restaurants said they realized the need for keeping costs down.

This feeling is reflected by Joseph Baum, a director of Restaurant Associates, which owns the Forum of Twelve Caesars—one of the most widely discussed restaurants to open in New York in recent years. He says:

"Cost control can be compared to a home freezer. It can be used to improve the family's menus or downgrade them. It depends on the know-how of the housewife; in the case of a restaurant, on the know-how of a chef. If it does no more than eliminate wasteful overproduction, it has more than paid for itself."

Portions Are Pre-Cut

One small hotel reported that it issues a pre-determined number of frozen pre-portioned steaks, lamb chops and veal cutlets to the chef each morning. The controller explained:

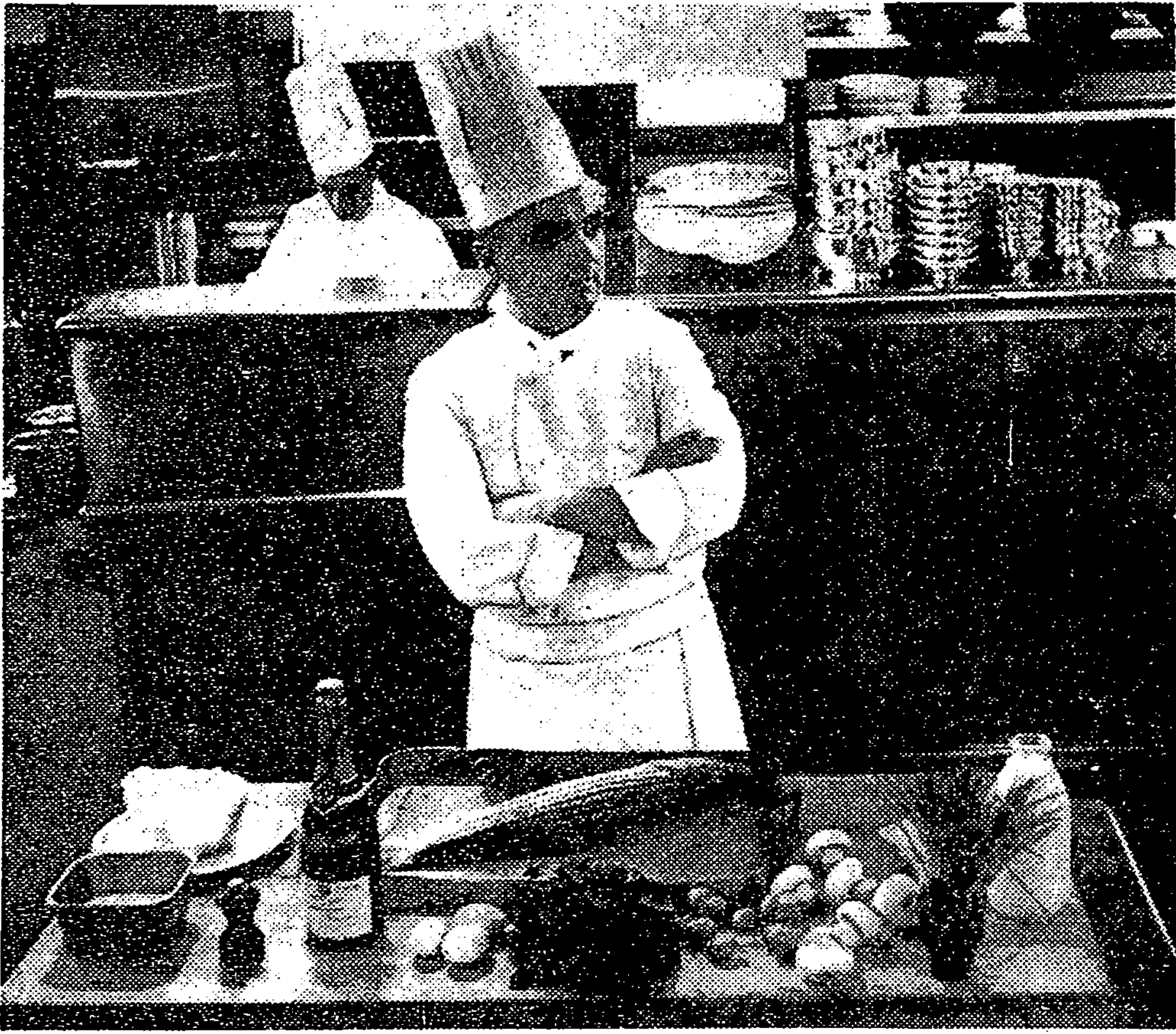
"Suppose four customers came in and ordered steak and each serving was a different size. Three of them would turn to the customer with the biggest steak and say: 'Who do you know?'"

"Frozen meat eliminates shrinkage in meat storage. A strip of beef in the ice box dries out on the edges. You have to trim it before you cut steaks and every day you lose so much."

"Or take scallops. Fresh by the gallon they come in uniform sizes. So we buy frozen scallops; they're all the same size."

Why, he was asked, are vegetables served in most restaurants so limp and unpalatable?

A Contrast in Cookery: A Made-to-Order French Classic and a System Many Restaurants Are Using



One of the few young European chefs left in the U. S. is Pierre Franey of Le Pavillon, who is shown here preparing a dish of classic French cookery: Whole fish stuffed with sole mousse and covered with champagne sauce. Ingredients include champagne, parsley, chives, shallots, mushrooms, butter, cream, eggs.



M. Franey's first step is the boning of the fish, which is a striped bass.



Stuffing of finely ground Dover sole is made in bowl of ice to give it texture.



Stuffing, which also has cream, egg whites, herbs, is spooned into the fish.



The fish is sprinkled with champagne, then baked. The sauce from pan is strained through a French "chinois."



After champagne, butter and fish stock are added to liquid, fish is garnished with fluted mushrooms, truffles.



As final touch, M. Franey mounts fish with an "at-telot," decorative skewer of mushrooms and truffles.



The contrast is in mass-production methods used all over the country, even in more expensive restaurants. Food, prepared in large quantities, is kept warm for extended periods. This makes for lower costs, but less tasty food.

interested in a quick turnover and how fast a waiter can run than in good table service.

The cry of impatience is frequently heard among restaurant men.

A fledgling waiter said: "The public is too impatient these days. Take two tables and give them exactly the same service. One couple will complain because the service is too slow; they're trying to get to the theatre. The other will complain because it's too fast; you're trying to rush them for a quick turnover."

And the impatience of young waiters irks older waiters. "Young men these days look for the fast turnover which means the fast buck," an old hand said. "They all learn eventually that the larger tips come from the customer who relaxes over his coffee."

What, this European-trained waiter was asked, is good table service?

"Being aware of the customer's needs before the customer is. It is rushing good food to the guest's table while it is freshly prepared and piping hot. A waiter must be courteous without being fawning, attentive without being subservient. "He must be methodical and neat and act with elegance and taste; it's small things like placing the monogram of a plate in the proper place."

Income Depends on Tips

A waiter in a first-class dining room is not particularly concerned with his salary. The bulk of his income comes from tips. A top waiter working five days a week, eight hours a day in a luxury room may receive \$10,000 a year. Bus boys in several of this city's night clubs are said to earn as much as \$150 a week, most of it in tips.

Because of the peculiar fiscal set-up in the industry, there is a large disparity in waiters' incomes, although by union regulation there are standard wages.

Despite the size of the restaurant and hotel industry in the United States, training facilities are few and limited. The most extensive program for chefs, cooks and waiters in this area is at the New York City Community College in Brooklyn. The program is conducted with the cooperation of the Hotel Association of New York City, the Hotel Trades Council and Local 6.

Each year the school grants training certificates to seventy waiters, a meager number considering the size of the industry in New York. The school also conducts advanced courses in table service at the Waldorf-Astoria.

Some Training Offered

Several universities offer training in basic cookery and table service to students of hotel management, but these students groom themselves for executive positions. Because of the expense, there is rarely an organized program of staff training in restaurants and hotels.

There is one person making a valiant effort to perpetuate classic cookery in this country. She is Mrs. Frances Roth, a handsome grandmother and lawyer, who until twelve years ago, had never seen the inside of the kitchen of a public dining room. She is administrative director of the nonprofit Culinary Institute of America.

The school, on a tree-lined, eight-acre campus next to the Yale Divinity School, was founded by her in 1947 at the request of New Haven restaurateurs. Today the school is staffed by eleven master chefs, most of them European-trained.

One reason why more schools have not engaged European chefs to train American youths is the matter of salary.

The average chef of executive caliber receives between \$15,000 and \$18,000 a year. Few institutions could afford to compete with this. Mrs. Roth has been successful in recruiting her staff by offering them short work weeks (many top-ranking chefs work twelve hours a day) and summer vacations with pay, along with more modest salaries.

To compensate in part for the latter, the chefs work in resort hotels during the summer and take their students with them. There is an enormous demand with high pay for skilled chefs in all summer resorts.

Many students at the Culinary Institute come from low-income families and most of them have extra-curricular jobs. The majority work sixteen hours a day—eight hours' training, eight hours' waiting. The tuition is \$1,000 for a thirty-

six week course. "Since the school was founded, 1,900 young men have been trained," Mrs. Roth said. Some of them have gone into management, but most are employed as chefs, bakers, cooks and stewards.

Another solution was proposed by Robert Audelan, president of the New York chapter of the Academie Cul-

inaire de France and executive chef of Essex House.

"Build a school with three restaurants and three kitchens," he suggested. "One of the restaurants should be a cafeteria, another an American-plan dining room and the third a restaurant which serves continental cuisine." (By American plan, he meant an abbreviated menu with plain cooking. The

continental dining room would feature classic French cuisine and dishes prepared to order.)

"All students would begin in the cafeteria kitchen where they would be trained for one year. Those with special ability would progress to the American-plan kitchen. The cream would be trained in the Continental kitchen.

And who would staff such a

school?

"Chefs who are beginning to retire," he said. "Many of us would be willing to work a few hours a day for such a program."

And who would finance such a project? "Management, the unions and the New York City Board of Education, if not Federal funds."

Directory To Dining

The following is a listing of New York restaurants that are recommended on the basis of varying merits. Such a listing will be published every Friday in The New York Times. Unless otherwise indicated, the restaurants are open seven days a week.

Gaston. 48 East Forty-ninth Street. PLaza 5-4285. Small and tastefully decorated, Gaston may qualify as having one of the most inspired French kitchens in town. Excellent appetizers and main courses. Complete luncheons from about \$4; dinners from about \$6.50. Also à la carte items. Cocktails. Wines in bottles and in carafes. Closed Saturday and Sunday. Reservations are recommended.

●

Marchi's. 251 East Thirty-first Street. ORegon 9-2494. One of New York's most unusual North Italian restaurants, it has no printed menu. There is an extensive antipasto, homemade lasagne, a fish course, a roast course (generally chicken and veal), vegetables, salads, cheese, fruits, dessert and coffee. One price: \$5.50. No bar, but appropriate Italian wines are available, \$4.50 to \$4.75 a bottle. Reservations recommended; frequently they are imperative. Dinner only, 6 to 9:30 P. M. weekdays; 5 to 9:30 Saturday and Sunday.

●

Tien Tsin, 569 West 125th Street. MONument 6-5710. In a city with a wealth of Chinese restaurants, there is probably none with a finer kitchen than this one. It has its off moments, but when it is good it can be superb. Modern décor. Luncheons, including soup, range from 80 cents to \$1.15. Dinners à la carte; main courses cost about \$2.50. The back of the menu lists family dinners (\$3.25 for two; \$13.50 for six). No bar. Reservations recommended.

●

Sayat Nova, 91 Charles Street. ORegon 5-7364. In a basement in Greenwich Village is this relatively spacious restaurant with good American cuisine. Excellent appetizers, lamb dishes and Near Eastern bread. A la carte main courses from about \$2.25; complete dinners from \$3.75. No cocktails, but apéritifs and wines are available. Closed Monday. Reservations recommended.

●

The King of the Sea. 879 Third Avenue. ELdorado 5-9309. This restaurant, perhaps Manhattan's best known seafood house, seems like the prototype after which most of the others were modeled. Typical main courses include broiled sea bass, \$2.25; broiled lobsters from \$3.95. Cocktails, wines. Reservations accepted.

Directory to Dining

A selective list of New York restaurants appears every Friday on this page. Stars, when they appear, are employed as follows: one star denotes restaurants of more than routine interest; two stars denote those of superior quality, and three stars pertain to restaurants regarded as among the finest in the city.

***Del Pezzo**, 33 West 47th Street, JU 6-9705 and CO 5-8744. The Del Pezzo is a most agreeable and unpretentious Italian restaurant and it is also one of the city's oldest. The veal dishes in particular are recommended, including the osso buco (braised veal knuckle) and stuffed breast of veal. Luncheons and dinners both prix fixe and à la carte. Luncheons with salad and coffee from \$1.50; complete dinners cost \$3.50. Cocktails, wines. Closed Sunday.

****Jimmy's Greek American Restaurant**, 12 State Street, BO 9-9458. Repeated visits to this famed cellar near the Battery bear out the fact that it is far and away the best Greek restaurant in the city. The food, whether a moussaka or simple braised lamb, is outstanding. Guests serve themselves from a small and very neat kitchen. Reservations are generally imperative. Luncheons only, except on Thursday when the restaurant is also open from 6 to 9 P.M. Entrees are à la carte from about \$3.50. There is no bar, but guests may bring their own wines. Closed Saturday and Sunday.

●
The Black Angus, 148 East 50th Street, PL 9-7454. Count steaks and chops among the favorite fare of New Yorkers. Here they are served in a typical, if somewhat labyrinthine, setting. Dinners, served seven days a week, are à la carte with main courses from \$3 to \$5.15. Luncheons, served Monday through Friday, are both prix fixe and à la carte. Complete luncheons cost approximately \$2.25; main courses to order from about \$1.85. Cocktails, wines.

●
La Petite Maison, 108 East 60th Street, EL 5-9313 and PL 5-5667. This is a small and pleasant enough restaurant with competent French and Italian cuisine. Both luncheons and dinner are table d'hôte. Complete luncheons from \$2.50; complete dinners from \$4.75. Luncheons are not served on Sunday. Cocktails, wines.

Just a Quiet Dinner for Two in Paris: 31 Dishes, Nine Wines, a \$4,000 Check

By **CRAIG CLAIBORNE**

If one were offered dinner for two at any price, to be eaten in any restaurant anywhere in the world, what would the choice be? And in these days of ever-higher prices, what would the cost be?

By submitting the highest bid on Channel 13's fundraising auction last June, we found ourselves in a position earlier this week to answer these questions. The place: Chez Denis in Paris. The cost: \$4,000.

Our winning bid was \$300.

One factor in the selection of the restaurant should be noted quickly: The donor of the dinner that Channel 13 auctioned was American Express, which set forth as its only condition the requirement that the establishment

be one that accepts its credit card.

In turn, when American Express ultimately learned what we had done, its reaction went from mild astonishment to being cheerful about the outcome. "Four thousand—was that francs or dollars?" asked Iris Burkatt, a company official, at one point.

At any rate, the selection of the restaurant dominated our fantasies for weeks as in our minds, we dined on a hundred meals or more. At times we were in Paris, then in Alsace. We considered Rome, Tokyo and Hong Kong, Copenhagen and Stockholm, Brussels and London.

The consideration of restaurants competed with thoughts of the greatest of champagnes and still wines, visions of caviar and foie gras, dreams of elaborate desserts. Perhaps we would choose nothing but vodka or

champagne with caviar followed by foie gras with Chateau d'Yquem — but no, any old millionaire could do that.

In addition to excluding those that did not recognize the credit card of the donor, we dismissed from our potential list of restaurants several celebrated places, simply, perhaps, because of their celebrity.

In time we considered Chez Denis, which is a great favorite among several food writers (Henri Gault, Christian Millau and Waverly Root among them), but is nonetheless not well known. It is a tiny place on the Rue Gustave Flaubert, not far from the Arc de Triomphe.

We visited Chez Denis in a party of three to reconnoiter. It was not hard to go

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We explained to the proprietor that our purpose was to have the finest dinner in Europe and that money was no obstacle.

Just a Quiet Dinner for 2 in Paris: 31 Dishes, 9 Wines, a \$4,000 Check

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Incognito, for we suspect that the proprietor, Denis Lahana, does not credit any Americans with even the most elementary knowledge of French wine and food.

The investigatory dinner was sumptuous. There was a chiffonade of lobster (a salad of cold lobster, cubed foie gras, a touch of cognac and, we suspect, cayenne, and a tarragon mayonnaise flavored with tomato, tossed with lettuce).

In addition, there was fresh foie gras with aspic, braised sweetbreads with a light truffle sauce, roast quail and those delectable tiny birds from the Landes region of France, ortolans. There was also a great personal favorite, andouillettes served with an outstanding sorrel sauce. The wine was a fine Pommard.

The meal having passed the test, we were able to ignore the few plastic boughs and plastic flowers tucked in beams here and there.

We wondered how it was that the place did not merit one, two or three stars in the Guide Michelin. It is not even listed. Mr. Denis would not comment on a story we had heard about inspectors from Michelin having somehow offended the proprietor and having been asked to leave.

A Crucial Question, Seriously Answered

After dinner, we asked Mr. Denis, offhandedly, how much he would charge for the most lavish dinner for two that he and his chef could prepare. He spoke in terms of \$2,000 to \$3,000.

We told him that we were about to celebrate a birthday and that money was no obstacle in ordering the finest dinner in Europe. Mr. Denis, with little hesitation, pulled up a chair and sat down. He took us seriously.

We asked him to consider the matter at his convenience and write to us with his proposal. When he did, his letter stated:

"In accordance with your demand, I propose to organize for you a prestigious dinner. In the land of my birth, the region of Bordeaux, one speaks of a repas de vins, a meal during the course of which a number of wines of great prestige are served, generally nine wines.

"I am suggesting nine such wines, to be served in the course of a dinner à la Française in the classic

tradition. To dine properly in this style, many dishes are offered and served to the guests, chosen with the sole thought that each dish be on the same high level as the wines and those most likely to give pleasure as the wines are tasted."

He suggested a dinner of 31 dishes that would start with an hors d'oeuvre and go on to three "services," the first consisting of soups, savory, an assortment of substantial main dishes, and ices or sherbets to clear the palate.

This would be followed by the second service: hot roasts or baked dishes, vegetables, cold, light, meaty dishes in aspic and desserts.

And then the third service: decorated confections, petits fours and fruits.

The youngest wine would be a six-year-old white burgundy, the oldest a 140-year-old madeira.

Mr. Denis set a price of \$4,000. This, we must hasten to add, included service and taxes. We accepted.

The proprietor suggested that the meal be served to four persons—all for the same price—because the food had to be prepared in a certain quantity and would be enough to serve as many as 10 persons, while the wines were enough for four.

We declined, because the rules set by American Express called for dinner for two. The dinner party would be made up of me and my colleague, Pierre Franey. Anything left over, we knew, would not go to waste.

Mr. Denis noted that it was not required that all foods be sampled and that the quantity of the food served would depend on the guest's appetite.

Beluga Caviar In Crystal

And so, we sat down to our \$4,000 dinner.

The hors d'oeuvre was presented: fresh Beluga caviar in crystal, enclosed in shaved ice, with toast. The wine was a superb 1966 Champagne Comtesse Marie de France.

Then came the first service, which started with three soups. There was consomme Denis, an inordinately good, rich, full-bodied, clear consomme of wild duck with shreds of fine crepes and herbs. It was clarified with raw duck and duck bones and then lightly thickened as many classic soups are, with fine tapioca.

The second soup (still of the first

service) was a crème Andalouse, an outstanding cream of tomato soup with shreds of sweet pimento and fines herbes, including fresh chives and chervil.

The first two soups were superb but the third, cold germiny (a cream of sorrel), seemed bland and anticlimactic. One spoonful of that sufficed.

The only wine served at this point was a touch of champagne. The soups having been disposed of, we moved on to a spectacularly delicate parfait of sweetbreads, an equally compelling mousse of quail in a small tarte, and a somewhat salty, almost abrasive but highly complementary tarte of Italian ham, mushrooms and a border of truffles.

1918 Chateau Latour, The Best Bordeaux

The wine was a 1918 Chateau Latour, and it was perhaps the best bordeaux we had ever known. It was very much alive, with the least trace of tannin.

The next segment of the first service included a fascinating dish that the proprietor said he had created, Belon oysters broiled quickly in the shell and served with a pure beurre blanc, the creamy, lightly thickened butter sauce.

Also in this segment were a lobster in a creamy, cardinal-red sauce that was heavily laden with chopped truffles and, after that, another startling but excellent dish, a sort of Provençal pie made with red mullet and baked with tomato, black olives and herbs, including fennel or anise seed, rosemary, sage and thyme.

The accompanying wine was a 1969 Montrachet Baron Thénard, which was extraordinary (to our taste, all first-rate Montrachet whites are extraordinary).

The final part of the first service consisted of what was termed filets et sots l'y laissent de poulard de Bresse, sauce suprême aux cèpes (the so-called "fillet" strips of chicken plus the "oysters" found in the after-backbone of chicken blended in a cream sauce containing sliced wild mushrooms).

Chartreuse of Partridge And Cooked Cabbage

There followed another curious but oddly appealing dish, a classic chartreuse of partridge, the pieces of roasted game nested in a bed of cooked cabbage and baked in a mosaic pattern, intricately styled, of carrot and turnip cut into fancy shapes.

And a tender rare-roasted fillet of Limousin beef with a rich truffle sauce.

The wine with the meat and game was a 1928 Chateau Mouton Rothschild. It was ageless and beautiful.

The first service finally ended with sherbets in three flavors—raspberry, orange and lemon. The purpose of this was to revive the palate for the second service, and it did. We were two hours into the meal and going at the food, it seemed, at a devilish pace.

The second service included the ortolans en brochette, an element of the dinner to be anticipated with a relish almost equal to that of the caviar or the foie gras.



Pierre Franey and Craig Claiborne, seated, with Denis Lahana, who prepared \$4,000 dinner for two

The small birds, which dine on berries through their brief lives, are cooked whole, with the head on, and without cleaning except for removing the feathers. They are as fat as butter and an absolute joy to bite into because of the succulence of the flesh. Even the bones, except for the tiny leg bones, are chewed and swallowed. There is one bird to one bite.

The second service also included fillets of wild duck en salmis in a rich brown game sauce. The final dish in this segment was a rognonade de veau, or roasted boned loin of veal wrapped in puff pastry with fresh black truffles about the size of golf balls.

The vegetables served were pommes Anna—the potatoes cut into small rounds and baked in butter—and a purée rachel, a purée of artichokes.

Foie Gras, Woodcock and Pheasant

Then came the cold meat delicacies. There was butter-rich fresh foie gras in clear aspic, breast meat of woodcocks that was cooked until rare and served with a natural chaud-froid, another aspic and cold pheasant with fresh hazelnuts.

The wines for this segment consisted of a 1947 Chateau Lafite-Rothschild, a 1961 Chateau Petrus, and the most magnificent wine of the evening, a 1929 Romanée Conti.

The dinner drew near an end with three sweets—a cold glazed charlotte with strawberries, an Ile flottante and poires alma. The wine for the sweets was a beautiful unctuous 1928 Chateau d'Yquem, which was quite sweet yet "dry."

The last service consisted of the pastry confections and fruits, served with an 1835 madeira. With coffee came a choice of a 100-year-old calvados or an hors d'âge cognac.

And for the \$4,000, logic asks if it was a perfect meal in all respects?

The answer is no.

The crystal was Baccarat and the silver was family sterling, but the presentation of the dishes, particularly the cold dishes such as the sweetbread parfait and quail mousse tarte, was mundane.

The foods were elegant to look at, but the over-all display was undistinguished, if not to say shabby.

The chartreuse of pheasant, which can be displayed stunningly, was presented on a most ordinary dish.

The food itself was generally exemplary, although there were regrettable lapses there, too. The lobster in the gratin was chewy and even the sauce could not compensate for that. The oysters, of necessity, had to be cooked as briefly as possible to prevent toughening, but the beurre blanc should have been very hot. The dish was almost lukewarm when

it reached the table, and so was the chartreuse of pheasant.

We've spent many hours reckoning the cost of the meal and find that we cannot break it down. We have decided this: We feel we could not have made a better choice, given the circumstance of time and place.

Mr. Denis declined to apply a cost to each of the wines, explaining that they contributed greatly to the total cost of the meal because it was necessary to open three bottles of the 1918 Latour in order to find one in proper condition.

Over all, it was an unforgettable evening and we have high praise for Claude Mornay, the 37-year-old genius behind the meal.

We reminded ourselves of one thing during the course of that evening: If you were Henry VIII, Lucullus, Gargantua and Bacchus, all rolled into one, you cannot possibly sustain, start to finish, a state of ecstasy while dining on a series of 31 dishes.

Wines, illusion or not, became increasingly interesting, although we were laudably sober at the end of the meal.